

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Supporting Veterans with Dementia and Caregivers During the Era of COVID-19

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Stanford
MEDICINE

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Overview

- 
- Description of COVID-19 in older Veterans with dementia

- 
- Obstacles to stress management due to COVID-19

- 
- Unique challenges for older Veterans living with dementia and their caregivers

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- VA-based resources

- 
- Community-based resources

- How often do you work with older Veterans living with dementia and their caregivers in your current setting?

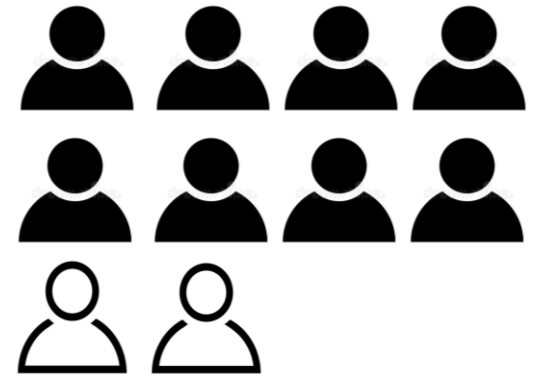
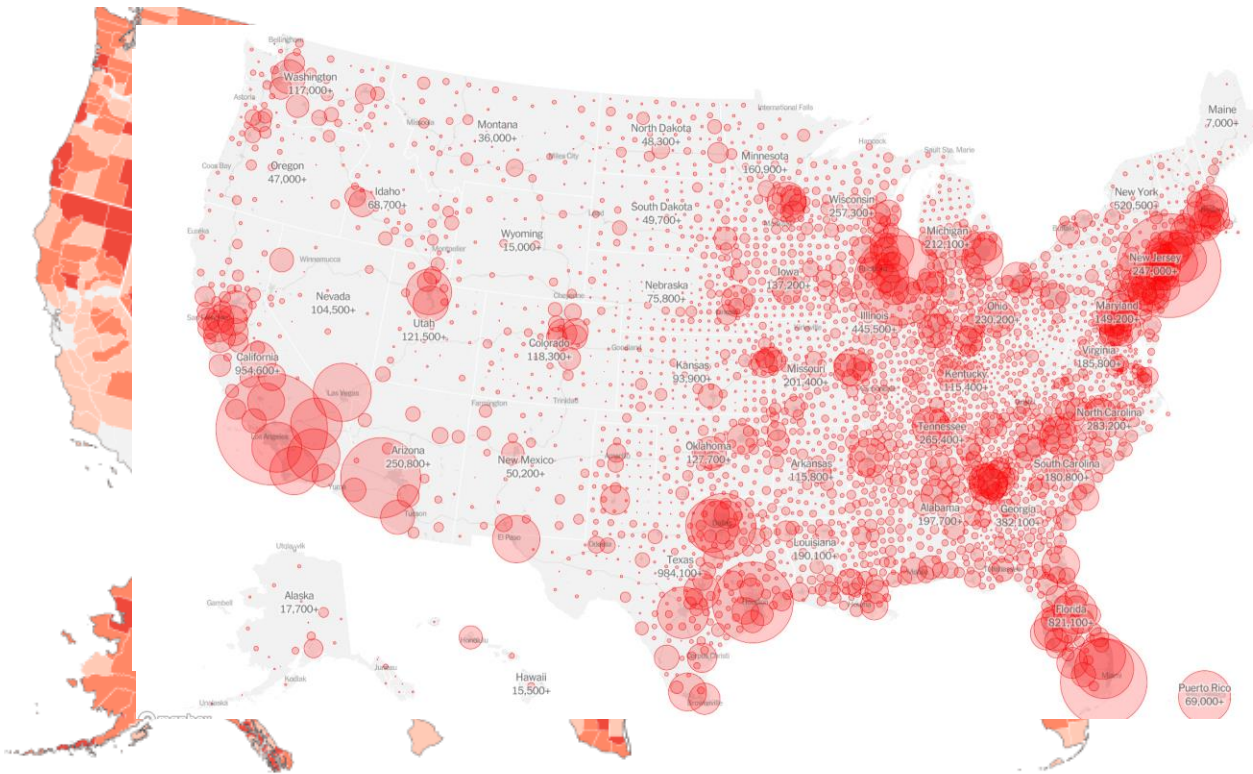
☐ Not at all / Never

☐ Some of the time

☐ Most of the time

☐ Nearly all of the time

COVID-19 Prevalence

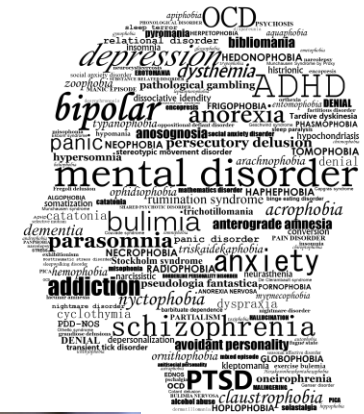


8 in 10 reported
COVID-19 deaths
have been adults 65
years or older²

NYT, Nov 5, 2020¹

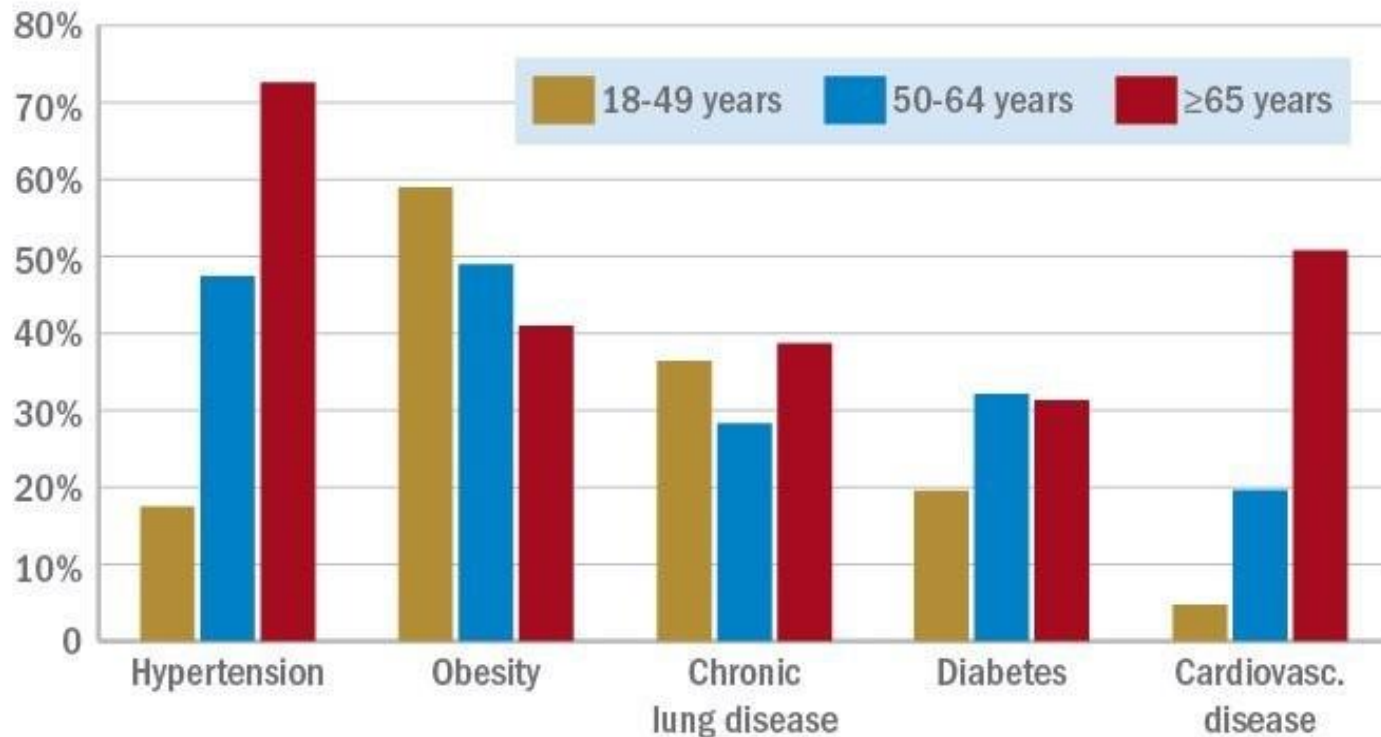
Vulnerability Factors

- Chronic medical conditions
- Mental illness, SUD
- Racial / ethnic disparities
- Cognitive impairment
- Homelessness
- Low SES
- Caregiving needs
- Restricted social support and community resources



Vulnerability Factors

Underlying conditions among adults hospitalized with COVID-19



Note: Based on data from the COVID-19–Associated Hospitalization Surveillance Network for patients hospitalized in 99 counties in 14 states from March 1-30, 2020.

Source: MMWR. 2020 Apr 8;69(early release):1-7

COVID-19 & Dementia

Case Example: Mr. G

82 year old Veteran who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease (mild/early stage). Lives in the community with spousal caregiver. Mrs. G phones and informs Veteran's primary care provider that he fell in the bathroom 3 days ago, is more confused, and has been spending a lot of time in bed sleeping. Today, he developed a cough and a fever of 100.0 F.

COVID-19 Symptoms

SYMPTOMS OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Know the symptoms of **COVID-19**, which can include the following:



Cough



Sore throat



Fever



Muscle pain



Chills



Shortness of breath
or difficulty breathing



New loss of taste
or smell



cdc.gov/coronavirus

COVID-19 & Dementia

Delirium³⁻⁵



Changes in
consciousness

Impaired attention

Sleep/wake cycle
disturbance

Hallucinations

Emotional disturbance

COVID-19 & Dementia

SYMPTOMS OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

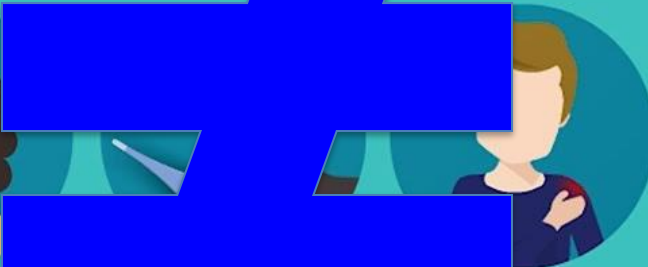
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cdc.gov/coronavirus

COVID-19 & Dementia

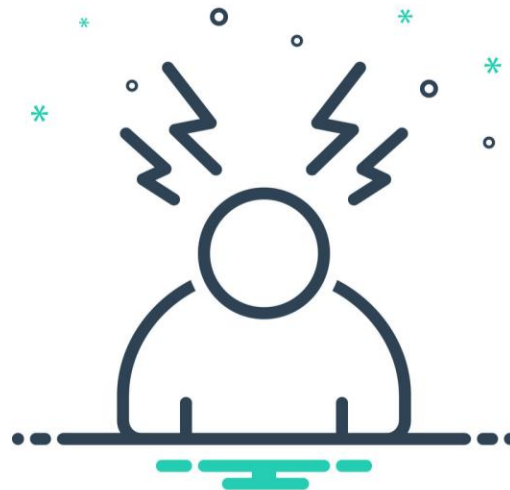
- Difficulty communicating symptoms to caregiver⁵
- Potential signs include changes in the following^{6,7}:
 - Cognition
 - increased confusion, slower processing speed
 - Behavior
 - Anxiety, agitation, aggression
 - Apathy, depression, increased sleep, fatigue
 - Function
 - Decline from baseline

- To what extent has COVID-19 impacted the mental health of your patients with dementia and their caregivers? Mental health over the past few months is:

- ☐ Much worse
- ☐ Some worse
- ☐ No change
- ☐ Some better
- ☐ Much better

Stress Management

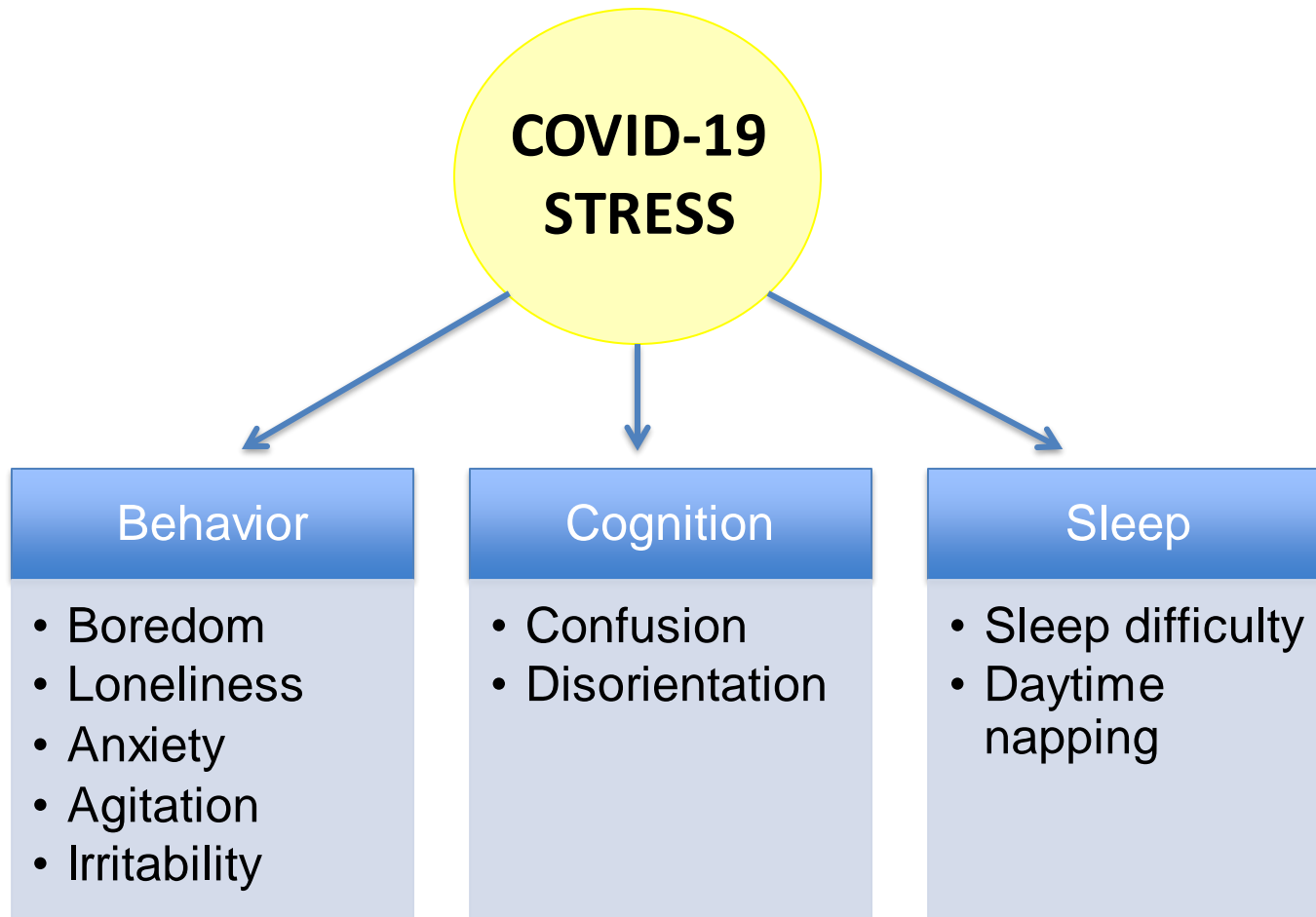
- COVID-related stress is unique
 - Pervasive; stress surrounding uncertainty
 - Can bring on stressful acute life events and exacerbate chronic stressors



Stress Management

- Major obstacles for Veterans with dementia and caregivers
 - Limited access to social support
 - Reduced opportunity for behavioral activation
 - Restricted access to usual care resources
- **Disruption of daily routines and structure**

Veterans with Dementia



Coping Skills

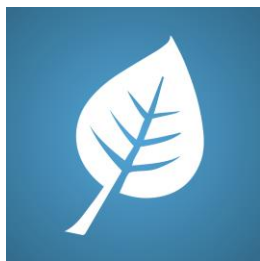
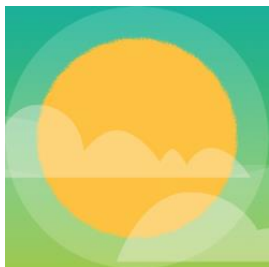
- Increasing / maintaining routine
- Menus of pleasant activities⁸
- Scheduling appropriate behavioral activation
 - Digital behavioral activation (e.g., podcasts, online videos & music)
- Hygiene reminders



- How confident do you feel in recommending COVID-19 specific resources for Veterans with dementia and their caregivers?

- ☐ Not at all confident
- ☐ A little confident
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Very confident

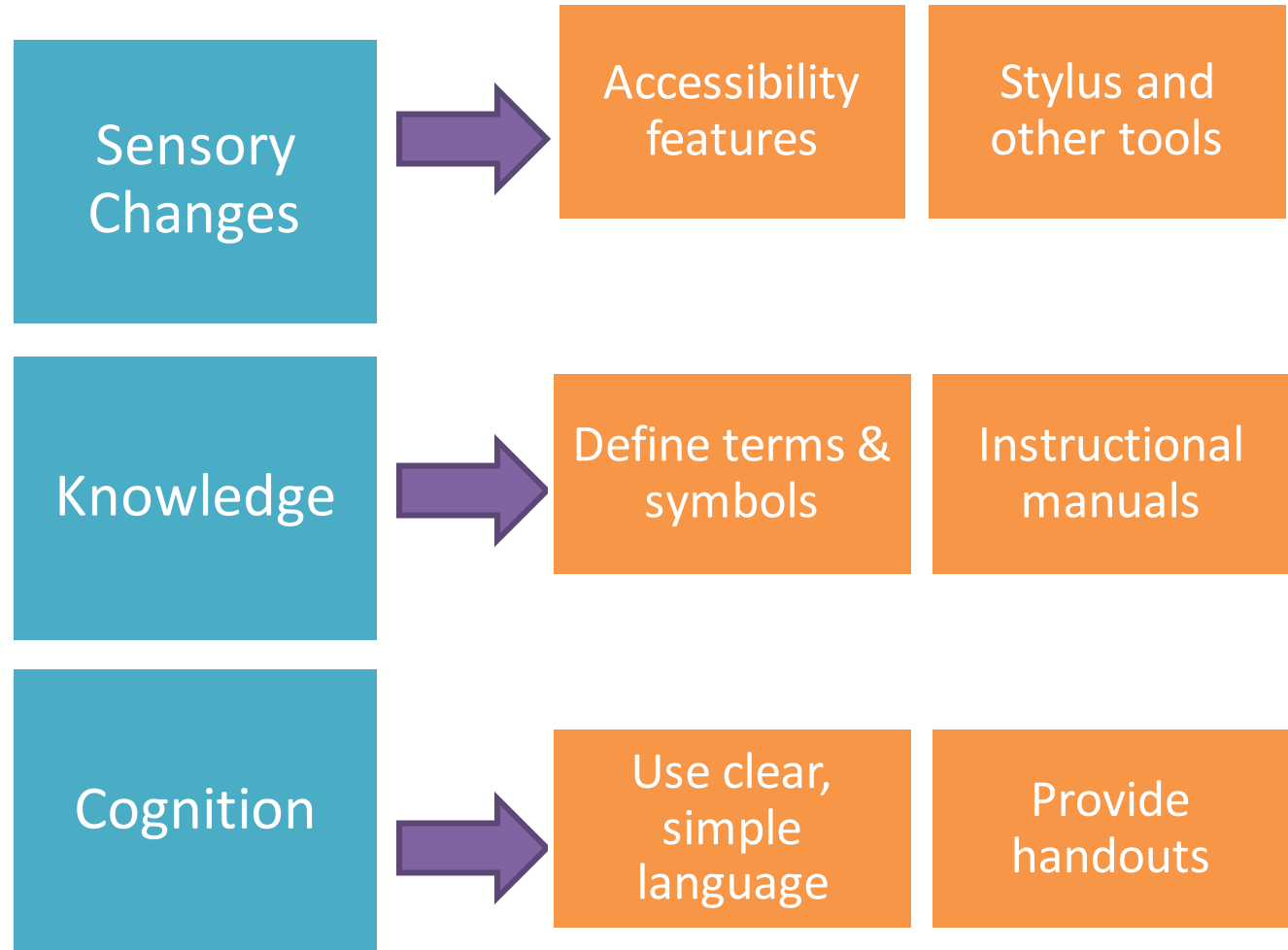
VA Resources



- **VA Mobile Apps for Mental Health**
 - VA mental health self-management mobile applications (apps) teach evidenced-based skills
 - Older adults benefit from these approaches⁹⁻¹²
 - Veterans with dementia need more assistance

Slide content courtesy of Christine Gould, PhD, ABPP

Older adults' barriers to using mobile apps



Slide content courtesy of Christine Gould, PhD, ABPP

Caregiver/Patient Education Handouts

VA Sharepoint: [Tech into Care Sharepoint](#)¹³

Link to request materials: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Geri-mobile>



How to
Download Mobile
Apps



Step-by-Step Guides
for PTSD Coach* and
Mindfulness Coach

Symbols Glossary Apple iOS®



Passcode and Finger Print ID (password)
creation (within settings)



Privacy information and settings
(within settings)



Settings
(access to general, security, and accessibility
settings)



Create a contact

Mobile Device Information

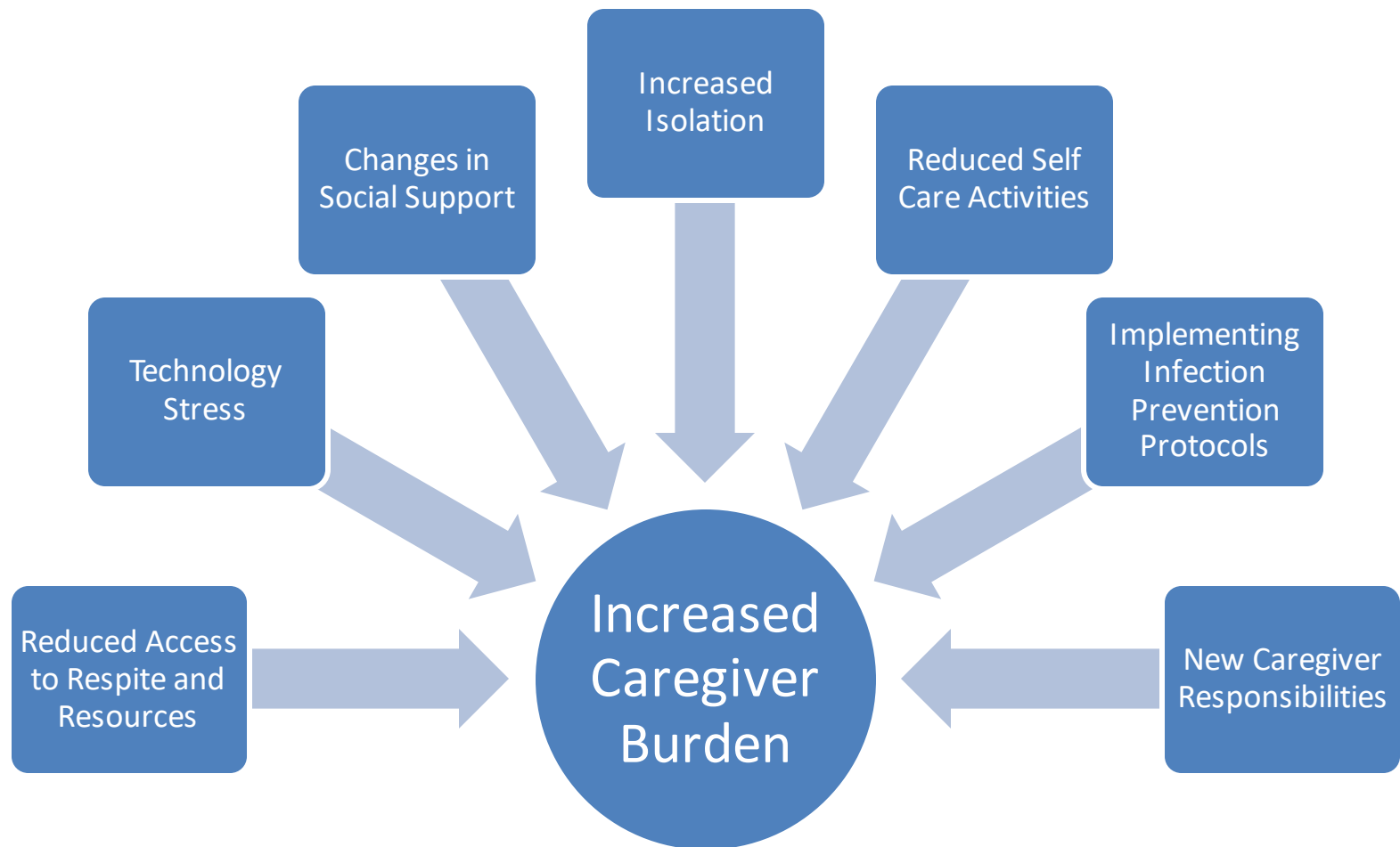
Slide content courtesy of Christine Gould, PhD, ABPP

* PTSD Coach 3.0 printable reference available

Community Resources

- Veterans with dementia
 - Alzheimer's Association Online Tools
 - <https://www.alz.org/help-support/resources/online-tools>
 - Administration for Community Living
 - <https://acl.gov/COVID-19>
 - State resources
 - Ex. Dementia Alliance of North Carolina¹⁴
 - Virtual Tours Links
 - Activity Box Kits
 - Minders¹⁵: Indoor activity ideas for older adults with dementia
 - Coloring pages

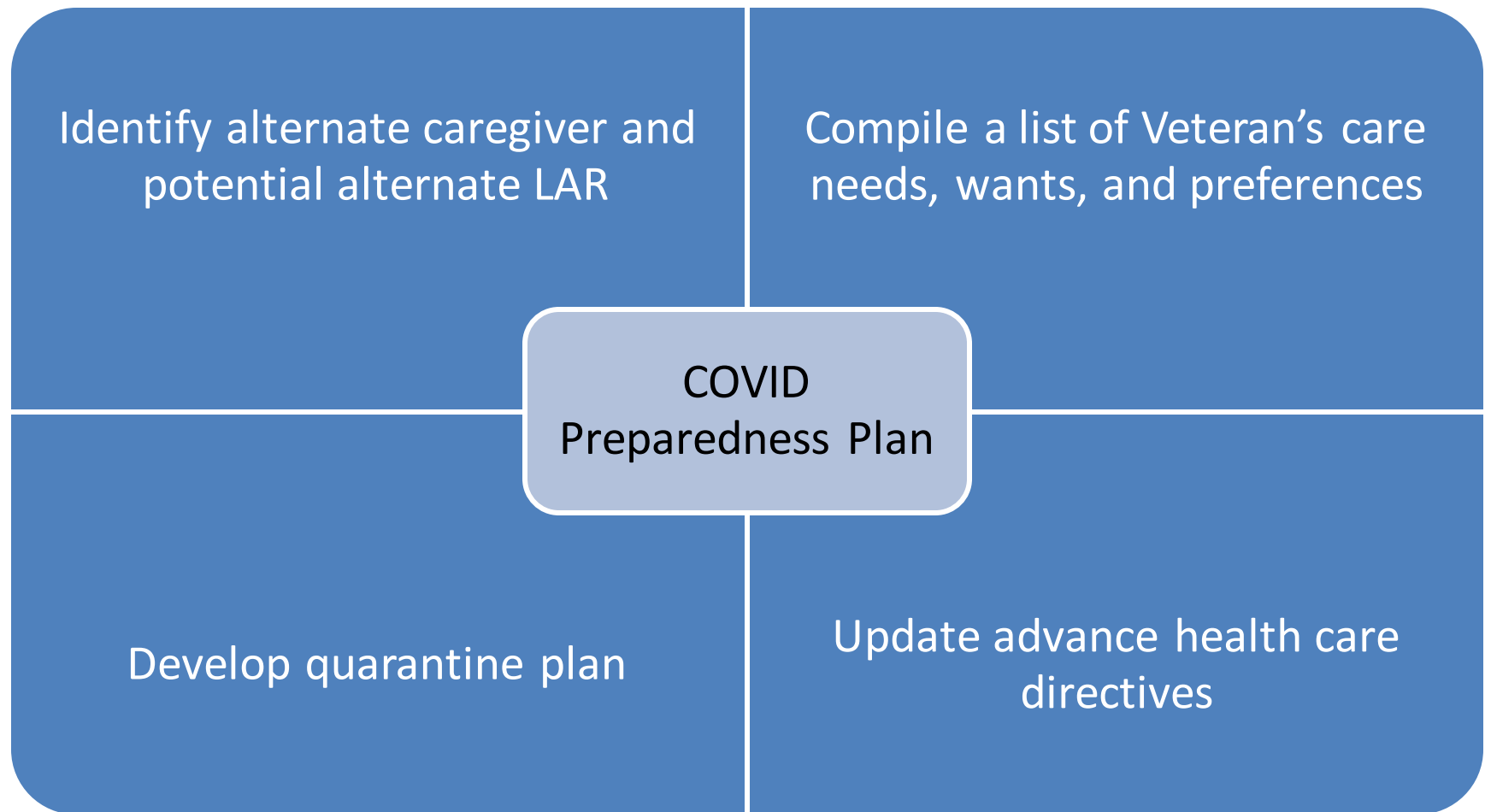
Potential Impact of COVID-19 on Caregivers of Veterans with Dementia



Supporting Caregivers of Veterans with Dementia

- Assess and address issues related to caring in COVID
 - Psychoeducation re: COVID in persons with dementia
 - Develop COVID Preparedness Plan
 - Expand current support systems
 - Set realistic expectations
- Reach out to the caregiver, don't wait for them to reach out to you

Supporting Caregivers of Veterans with Dementia



VA Resources

- Caregivers
 - Program of General Caregiver Support Services
 - Virtual support groups
 - Caregiver Support Program Peer Support Mentoring Program
 - VHA Office of Rural Health
 - <https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/vets/resources.asp#dem>
 - Elizabeth Dole Foundation
 - Hidden Heroes
 - <https://hiddenheroes.org/coronavirus/>
 - Caregiver Action Network
 - <https://hiddenheroes.org/resource/caregiver-action-network/>



Community Resources

- Caregivers
 - Gerocentral
 - <https://gerocentral.org/clinical-toolbox/covid-19-resources/>
 - Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving
 - <https://www.rosalynncarter.org/programs/covid-caregiving/>
 - Alzheimer's Association
 - [https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)-tips-for-dementia-care](https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/coronavirus-(covid-19)-tips-for-dementia-care)
 - Family Caregiver Alliance
 - <https://www.caregiver.org/coronavirus-covid-19-resources-and-articles-family-caregivers>

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